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PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 5th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 15 May 1991, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. DJOUDI (Algeria)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (continued) (E/1991/30)

Emergency assistance for the economic and social rehabilitation of Liberia

Mr. JONAH (Under-Secretary-General for Special Political Questions, Regional Cooperation, Decolonization and Trusteeship) recalled that in its resolution 45/232, the General Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to apprise the Economic and Social Council, at its first regular session of 1991, of his efforts to implement that resolution, which called for emergency assistance to Liberia.

The civil conflict in Liberia had not only had a devastating effect on the country's entire population and on its economic and social infrastructure, but had also had a serious impact on the populations of neighbouring countries, which had generously received hundreds of thousands of Liberians who had fled their own country.

The United Nations was attempting to respond in a coordinated manner to the crisis. The Secretary-General had appointed a Special Coordinator for Emergency Relief Operations in Liberia, responsible for coordinating all institutional and operational arrangements for relief programmes and other humanitarian activities in the country. The Office itself included representatives of the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was responsible for field coordination at the subregional level with respect to refugees and returnees. United Nations Resident Coordinators in the host countries were responsible for national programmes and activities with respect to affected host-country populations. At United Nations Headquarters, overall responsibility for coordinating the relief programme was assigned to the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for

Special Political Questions, Regional Cooperation, Decolonization and Trusteeship. The United Nations system was also working closely with non-governmental organizations operating in Liberia and in neighbouring countries. Those organizations played a useful and indispensable role.

With respect to activities which addressed the specific needs of the affected population groups, mention should first be made of those relating to the refugees. There were an estimated 325,000 Liberian refugees in Guinea, 300,000 in Côte d'Ivoire and 125,000 in Sierra Leone. Given the common ethnic origins of the subregion's inhabitants, most of those refugees had been readily accepted by the populations of the host countries and integrated into neighbourhoods and village family compounds; the establishment of densely populated refugee camps had thereby been avoided. That had facilitated the survival and well-being of the refugees, but had had far-reaching effects on the already overburdened local infrastructures.

The recent incidence of fighting along the border between Sierra Leone and Liberia had complicated the situation. On the one hand, it had been decided to establish refugee camps in Sierra Leone, but at the same time, the border conflict had led to refugee movements to neighbouring countries, particularly Guinea. The United Nations was monitoring those developments closely, and would undertake all possible measures to secure the welfare and protection of the affected refugees.

UNHCR had opened main offices in the three countries concerned, as well as six field offices, and in March 1991 had sent a mission to the three affected countries to reassess needs and develop a draft contingency plan for voluntary repatriation. The plan would also take into consideration the recommendations of the forthcoming inter-agency assessment mission to Liberia, as well as the results of the refugee census being carried out in collaboration with national authorities.

During the current year, UNHCR would continue to provide certain care and maintenance activities under its general programme. WFP, UNICEF and WHO would continue to assist refugees in their respective fields of expertise. Every effort would be made to promote and achieve voluntary repatriation, which was the most desirable solution for any refugee.

(Mr. Jonah)

As for host-country populations, it should be noted that the majority of Liberian refugees had been integrated into host-country communities and fed and sheltered by local families. That had given rise to serious disruptions in the social life and household economy of the host families and had strained local infrastructures. In the three host countries, emergency programmes had been proposed for 1991 for health care, water and sanitation, housing, agriculture, environment and education. UNDP had a major role to play in those activities, in cooperation with the relevant organizations of the United Nations system.

Regarding United Nations operations in Liberia itself, the Special Coordinator for Emergency Relief Operations in Liberia, named in July 1990, chaired a Coordination Committee composed of the principal representatives of all United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and other organizations participating in the Monrovia relief effort.

On 5 December 1990, the Secretary-General had launched an appeal for $14.4 million to finance the critical first months of emergency relief operations in the Monrovia area. Programme priorities included general food rations and supplementary feeding for malnourished children, a public immunization programme, building a self-contained field hospital to meet critical medical needs, restoring reliable electrical power supply and rebuilding the water treatment plant.

The food assistance programme was carried out by WFP in cooperation with various international relief agencies and the SELF programme, a Liberian voluntary effort. The number of people registered for food assistance had increased steadily, and during the seventh distribution in April 1991 had reached more than 750,000 people.

UNICEF, in close cooperation with WHO, had assumed lead responsibility in the non-food sector. The health and medical facilities established or reconstructed since the start of the operation included supplementary feeding centres, day care centres, health centres, first aid posts, maternal-child clinics and a field hospital sponsored by Sweden and Norway.

(Mr. Jonah)

While progress to date had been encouraging, the Secretary-General's appeal was only the beginning. It had not addressed the needs of the 1.5 million Liberians living in the countryside who were also suffering serious deprivation. A United Nations inter-agency mission would be sent the following week to assess the needs of that group, as the first step towards an expanded United Nations relief programme for the whole of Liberia. It was anticipated that the expansion would require substantial resources, due to the size and remoteness of the rural population, and also for additional requirements to continue repatriation of refugees.

The real solution to the situation in Liberia would depend, in the final analysis, on a resolution of the political conflicts in the country. In that respect, he recognized the efforts to achieve that goal by all parties involved, including the Economic Community of West African States, and hoped they would succeed. In the meantime, it was of critical importance to maintain the emergency relief programme. The international community had responded generously to Liberia's humanitarian needs, but much remained to be done. On behalf of the Secretary-General, he urged donor countries to continue their support and to respond in a timely manner to the appeal which the Secretary-General would issue in the near future.

Mr. HARRISON (United Kingdom) asked approximately how much the international community had pledged to date in response to the Secretary-General's first appeal, in which he had solicited $14.4 million for assistance to Liberia.

Mr. JONAH (Under-Secretary-General for Special Political Questions, Regional Cooperation, Decolonization and Trusteeship) said he believed that pledges amounted to approximately $10 million.

Enlargement of the membership of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (E/1990/121)

The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the note verbale dated 27 September 1990 from the Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (E/1990/121).

Mr. GOSHU (Observer for Ethiopia) said that during the resumed second regular session of the Council in November 1990, Ethiopia had expressed its wish to become a member of the Executive Committee. The reason was that it hosted one of the largest refugee populations in the world. Moreover, thousands of Ethiopians had left their homeland and were living as refugees in neighbouring countries. Ethiopia's particular geographical location had long made it a focal point for waves of refugees. However, the problem of refugees in the Horn of Africa in general, and in Ethiopia in particular, had never before been as grave. Any solution to the refugee problem in the Horn of Africa must take into account Ethiopia's views and position on the matter, and there was thus a need for Ethiopia to become a member of the Executive Committee of UNHCR. He hoped that the Economic and Social Council would recommend the enlargement of the membership of the Committee to give Ethiopia the opportunity to be represented in it and to participate fully in its future work. To that end, his delegation would submit a draft resolution on the matter.

Dates of the Meeting of the Ad Hoc Group of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters

The CHAIRMAN said that the meeting of the Ad Hoc Group of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters had been scheduled to be held at Geneva from 9 to 13 December 1991. A request had been made to change the dates to 11 to 17 December 1991.

Mr. AHMED (Under-Secretary-General for International Economic and Social Affairs) said that the request to change the meeting dates was based upon a desire to harmonize the dates with the Group's previous practice. Since its inception, the Group had normally begun its meetings in mid-week, allowing the Chairman and the Rapporteur to complete most of the report over the weekend, and then to take up the remaining items in the first few days of the following week. The change of dates would have no financial implications, nor would it entail any additional requirements in the budgetary provisions, which had already been included in the programme budget for the current biennium.

The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Council decided to change the dates of the Meeting to 11 to 17 December 1991.

It was so decided.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The CHAIRMAN recalled that, with respect to item 5 of the provisional agenda (Statistical and cartographic questions), the suggestion made by the representative of Morocco with regard to subitem (a) (Statistics) was still pending.

Mrs. ZAINOEDDIN (Programme Planning and Budget Division) informed the Council that if consideration of subitem 5 (a) was postponed until the Economic and Social Council's second regular session of 1991, costs for staff travel to Geneva would amount to approximately $5,000, and could be met within the budget appropriations approved for section IV of the programme budget for 1990-1991.

The CHAIRMAN said that, in the light of the explanations by the representative of the Programme Planning and Budget Division he would take it, if he heard no objection, that the Council approved the suggestion of the representative of Morocco.

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN invited the Council to resume consideration of requests from non-governmental organizations for hearings. At the previous meeting, the Council had adopted the recommendations of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations contained in its report (E/1991/73). That Committee had just submitted an addendum to the report, which gave a favourable recommendation with respect to a request for hearings from another non-governmental organization. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Council approved the recommendation contained in paragraph 2 of document E/1991/73/Add.1.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.